

DOJ statement on Vaughn trials

The Department of Justice on Wednesday released the following statement:

On the morning of February 2, 2017, a correctional officer was found dead – tragically and brutally murdered – in a prison building that had been set on fire, flooded, and under the control of inmates for 24 hours. Obtaining a measure of justice for Lt. Steven Floyd meant spending almost two years trying to piece together what happened in the building with no physical, video, or audio evidence, using only statements from more than a hundred inmates who were both suspects and witnesses. From the outset, it was always going to be one of the hardest cases for the Delaware State Police to investigate and for the Department of Justice to prove.

Despite these challenges, prosecutors and investigators did herculean work in the ensuing years to find those responsible for the riot and its consequences and to present a case they believed could meet their burden of proof in a court of law. They succeeded in securing convictions for Dwayne Staats for murder, riot, kidnapping, assault, and conspiracy, and Jarreau Ayers for riot, kidnapping, assault, and conspiracy.

The prosecutors on this trial team are some of DOJ's best. Their devotion to this case and their adherence to the Court's highest ethical standards are unwavering. Nevertheless, three juries have since shown that proving beyond a reasonable doubt who was responsible for Lt. Floyd's death is no longer possible. Therefore, prosecutors have advised the Court that the State will not move forward with any further pending charges in connection with the Vaughn riot.

Above all else, Sandra Floyd, her family, the two correctional officers and the counselor who endured the ordeal, and the entire staff of the Department of Correction are in all of our hearts, as they have been throughout this tragedy.

Out of more than a hundred inmates in Building C, a handful agreed to testify to what they saw and knew about what happened on February 1. Prosecutors offered no favorable treatment in exchange for that testimony, and the inmate witnesses not only risked their own safety but lost out on opportunities for counseling or work programs because they had to be housed apart from other inmates. The trial team appreciates their willingness to try to help bring justice in these cases, and rejects any implication that any witness was pressured to testify. As stated, and unfortunately, juries did not conclude that the State met its very high burden of proof to attain convictions on most of the charges.